

Message Text

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51 L

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 ACDA-19 IO-14 EB-11 PM-07

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R 101815Z DEC 73

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: GW, PGOV, PINT

SUBJECT: BRANDT'S LEADERSHIP CRITICIZED IN FRG PRESS

REF: BONN 16931

1. SUMMARY: THIS WEEK'S POPULAR AND WIDELY-READ FRG NEWS MAGAZINE, DER SPIEGEL, HAS DONE ITS COVER STORY ON WILLY BRANDT'S POLITICAL STANDING IN THE FRG ON HIS SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY (DECEMBER 18) AND ONE YEAR AFTER HE WAS RE-ELECTED CHANCELLOR. ENTITLED "WILLY BRANDT AT SIXTY: THE MONUMENT IS CRUMBLING", THE PIECE IS UNIFORMLY CRITICAL ALTHOUGH IT BREAKS NO NEW GROUND: IT SIMPLY REVIEWS THE VARIOUS WEAKNESSES EVIDENT IN
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BRANDT'S LEADERSHIP OF THE GOVERNMENT AND SPD IN THE

LAST YEAR. A MORE BALANCED BUT ALSO CRITICAL ANALYTICAL ARTICLE ON BRANDT'S POSITION AT THE END OF 1973 APPEARED IN THE DECEMBER 7 ISSUE OF THE PRESTIGIOUS WEEKLY, DIE ZEIT. IT CONCLUDES THAT "DISPLEASURE WITH THE LEADERSHIP AND WITH THE COALITION COMBINE AMONG SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO CREATE A GENERAL MALAISE". COMMENT: THE NEGATIVE ASSESSMENTS OF BRANDT AND HIS LEADERSHIP WHICH FOLLOW FAIRLY CLOSELY OUR OWN EVALUATION OF HIS PERFORMANCE IN THE PAST YEAR (REFTEL) ARE ALL THE MORE INTERESTING SINCE BOTH DIE ZEIT AND DER SPIEGEL HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED FRIENDLY TO BRANDT AND THE SPD IN THE PAST. END COMMENT.

2. THE SPIEGEL PIECE WAS, IN SOME WAYS, A HATCHET JOB, ATTEMPTING TO MAKE BRANDT OUT AS A BUMBLING AND INEFFECTIVE LEADER WHO HAS LET MATTERS GET AWAY FROM HIM. THE INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTICLE SUMS UP SPIEGEL'S CONCLUSIONS: "IN HIS FIFTH YEAR AS CHANCELLOR, WILLY BRANDT HAS REACHED THE LIMITS OF HIS LEADERSHIP SKILLS. EASTERN POLICY IS STAGNATING. THE DOMESTIC REFORM PROGRAM IS HARDLY PROGRESSING. WITHIN THE SPD, THE INTEGRATING POWER OF THE CHAIRMAN HAS DIMINISHED. WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, THE CHANCELLOR LEAVES THE FDP TOO MUCH FREEDOM IN THE EYES OF MANY PARTY COMRADES. AND CONSIDERATION OF HIS OVERTHROW IS NO LONGER TABOO."

3. THE ARTICLE REVIEWS, AT LENGTH AND IN A FAIRLY TENDENTIOUS WAY, THE VARIOUS SHORTCOMINGS IT CONSIDERS TO HAVE FOUND IN BRANDT'S LEADERSHIP. THE LACK OF DIRECTION IN THE CHANCELLERY, THE SEEMING LEAVE-IT-TO-THE-FOREIGN-MINISTRY ATTITUDE IN FOREIGN POLICY, THE ABSENCE OF GUIDELINES FOR DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, INCLUDING THE FEDERAL BUDGET, AND THE APPARENT READINESS OF THE CHANCELLOR CONSTANTLY TO BOW TO FDP PRESSURES AND PERSONALITIES ON EVERY ISSUE WHERE THE MINOR PARTY WANTS ITS WAY. HAVING SAID ALL OF THIS, SPIEGEL CONCLUDES THAT THE SPD STILL HAS NOT MUCH CHANCE OF CHANGING ITS LEADER: AN ALTERNATIVE AT PRESENT SIMPLY DOES NOT EXIST, IN THE MAGAZINE'S VIEW. ITS FEELING SEEMS TO BE THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE CRUMBLING MONUMENT PROBABLY STILL HAS A WAY TO GO BEFORE IT TUMBLES.

*4. DIE ZEIT, THE RENOWNED LIBERAL WEEKLY NEWSPAPER, HAS A MORE-BALANCED FULL-PAGE ARTICLE BY ROLF ZUNDEL, ITS RESPECTED -POLITICAL COMMENTATOR. HE NOTES THE FEELING OF UNHAPPINESS IN BONN OVER BRANDT'S REMOTENESS, CITING THE CRITICISM OF THE CHANCELLOR BY OLD

FRIEND GUENTHER GRASS AS WELL AS SPD IDEOLOGUE WEHNER.
BUT ZUNDEL DEFENDS BRANDT BY ASSERTING THAT
BRANDT NEVER WAS A DRAMATI* LEADER, AND THAT HE MADE
EVEN VERY IMPORTANT DECISIONS IN A HIGHLY UNSPECTACULAR
WAY. THE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP IS TIME CONSUMING BUT
NO IMPORTANT MATTERS WERE DELAYED. ZUNOEL INDEED FINDS
IT ODD THAT A GOVERNMENT WHICH DISPLAYS AN ABOVE AVER-
AGE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY FARES SO BADLY IN THE PUBLIC'S
JUDGMENT.

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5. ZUNDEL BELIEVES THAT ONE CAUSE MAY BE THAT BRANDT'S
CAUTIOUS STYLE HAS SIMPLY WORN OUT. WHEREAS HE ONCE

WAS ABLE TO HUMOR AND C*JOLE PEOPLE INTO DOING HIS
BIDDING, HE NOW APPEARS TIRED OF THE WHOLE BUSINESS:
HE FINDS IT INCREASINGLY TROUBLESOME TO MEET THE
POLITICIAN'S OBLIGATION OF CONSTANT COMMUNICATION.

6. ZUNDEL FEELS THAT BRANDT'S POLITICAL ANTENNAE
ARE NOT OPERATING WITH PERFECT PRECISION. HE HAS PER-
MITTED DIFFICULT PERSONNEL PROBLEMS TO AFFECT THE
WORKINGS OF THE CHANCELLERY AND HAS DONE NOTHING TO
CORRECT THE SITUATION. (SPIEGEL CAME DOWN PARTICULARLY
HARD ON THIS POINT: IT HAS LONG FOCUSED ON STATE SECRE-
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TARY GRABERT AS THE PRINCIPAL CULPRIT IN CREAT-
ING PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CHANCELLERY.) BRANDT HAS ALSO
FAILED TO ASSESS THE SENTIMENT OF THE POWERFUL SPD
BUNDESTAG PARTY GROUP, WHICH NOW REGARDS WEHNER RATHER
THAN BRANDT AS ITS SPOKESMAN.

7. ZUNDEL CONCLUDES, JUST AS DID SPIEGEL, THAT THE
IDEA OF AN SPD PARTY OR AN SPD/FDP COALITION GOVERN-
MENT WITHOUT BRANDT AT THE HEAD IS NOTHING BUT SPECULA-
TION BY OUTSIDERS AT THIS POINT. THE REASONS BEHIND
THE DISCUSSION OF THE DECLINE IN BRANDT'S AUTHORITY
ARE NONETHELESS THERE, AND IF THE DISCUSSION CONTINUES
WITHOUT DIRECTION OR RESTRAINT, IT COULD BRING THE END
OF THE BRANDT GOVERNMENT. THERE IS A GENERAL MALAISE
AMONG SOCIAL DEMOCRATS DUE TO DISPLEASURE WITH THE
BRANDT LEADERSHIP AND WITH THE COALITION. ZUNDEL ENDS
BY COMMENTING THAT ON TOP ALL THIS NOW COMES THE ENERGY
CRISIS, THE HANDLING OF WHICH WILL LARGELY DETERMINE
BRANDT'S POLITICAL FATE.

8. COMMENT: BOTH DER SPIEGEL AND DIE ZEIT ARE KNOWN
FOR THEIR SUPPORT FOR BRANDT AND THE SPD. THEIR
CRITICISM OF BRANDT'S LEADERSHIP WILL THEREFORE HAVE
SOME IMPACT PUBLICLY IN GERMANY. THE ARTICLES MAY
ALSO DRIVE BRANDT EVEN FURTHER INTO HIS REMOTENESS,
FOR HE IS KNOWN TO TAKE SUCH EXPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC
CRITICISM VERY PERSONALLY.

9. THE ARTICLES TEND TO SUBSTANTIATE OUR OWN ASSESS-
MENT OF BRANDT'S PERFORMANCE IN THE PAST YEAR (REFTEL).
WE SEE LITTLE PROSPECT AT PRESENT OF HIS EMERGING ANY
TIME SOON, FULL OF ENERGY AND DRIVE, AS HE HAS
DONE SO OFTEN IN THE PAST AFTER A PERIOD OF BEING
DOWN AND DEPRESSED. PERHAPS THE CURRENT ENERGY CRISIS,
IF IT WORSENS (AS SEEMS LIKELY), MAY GALVANIZE
HIM INTO ACTION. IF IT DOES NOT, THEN THE COALITION
SEEMS IN FOR DIFFICULT TIMES IN A PERIOD WHICH DEMANDS

LEADERSHIP OF THE HIGHEST ORDER.

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